

**General Breed Description:**

Dexter cattle are a tri-purpose breed: beef, milk, and draft. As such, breeders should strive to produce well-conformed, well-tempered animals that efficiently meet the demands of all three purposes without straying into the extremes of strictly dairy or strictly beef characteristics. The ideal Dexter cow should experience no problems at calving and should display appropriately strong maternal instincts. She should produce enough rich milk to raise a healthy calf with a substantial weaning weight while still providing a reasonable amount of milk for her owner. Dexter bulls should be even-tempered, balanced-looking athletes that perform their breeding tasks without losing a smooth, muscled condition. Dexter steers should produce heavy carcasses that produce the finest quality beef that displays sufficient marbling. Dexter oxen should display the intelligence and cooperative temperament that deems them excellent candidates for stout, amiable, long-lived draft animals. And every Dexter, whether cow, heifer, calf, bull, steer, or oxen, should display attributes of thriftiness that are the trademark of this hardy heritage breed.

Dexters are not a miniature breed; their size is not due to breeding programs aimed at miniaturization. As the smallest naturally-statured breed in the world, their size of bone, depth of body, and shortness of leg should compose a consistently uniform harmony throughout the animal's body. A Dexter should look balanced and smoothly blended with proportions that result in a uniform, harmonious, graceful animal. Characteristics that determine the feeding ability, reproductive capacity, health, vigor and longevity should be apparent:

- broad muzzle and large nostrils
- wide and deep chest capacity, as determined by the length and fullness of the fore ribs and width of chest floor
- deep heart girth and well-sprung ribs encasing the diaphragm, heart and lungs

Color: Solid black, solid red, or solid dun are of equal merit. A small amount of white on the reproductive organs, udder and/or underline (behind the umbilicus) is acceptable. White, light, or dark hairs in the tassel (switch) of the tail are also permissible.

Head: Short, broad head should taper gracefully towards a broad muzzle. Jaw should be wide enough to accommodate well-placed teeth with an even bite. Eyes should be bright and prominent. Horns, if they are present, should be moderately thick with an inward, upward curve. Horned, dehorned, and polled animals are all of equal merit.

Cows: Udder should be well attached with high and wide rear attachment and strong median suspensory ligament. The four teats should be of medium size and well-spaced on the udder, hanging plumb and of equal length. All four quarters should be of equal size.

Bulls: Testicles should be well-hung and of even size, with four well defined teats evenly spaced in front of the scrotum. The sheath should be of moderate size and held near the body. The penis should retract completely into the sheath when at rest.

Steer: Steers should conform to general breed guidelines with a smooth, sleek appearance that indicates thriftiness, optimum beef production, and quality meat.

Size: Typical height ranges in Dexters can vary between and within the populations of carriers and non-carriers of chondrodysplasia. Both carriers and non-carriers are of equal merit. Because the ADCA does not encourage breeding especially small or especially large Dexters, breeding programs that consistently push animals to extremes in either size direction are not encouraged.

Cows: Typical range in height is 34 - 46 inches, with a majority in the range of 36-42 inches, measured at the hip.

Bulls: Typical range in height is 36 - 50 inches, with a majority in the range of 38-44 inches, measured at the hip.

Show criteria: No comparative significance should be given in the show ring to the heights of immature animals since individual growth rates and chondrodysplasia status make it impossible to estimate final heights at maturity. Dexters can continue to grow past 3 years of age, so final mature height should not be estimated when judging animals. Each Dexter in the show ring should be judged in light of its individual merits on the day of the competition, comparing its appearance to the general breed description. Serious consideration should be given to excellence of conformation as a truly tri-purpose bovine and overall healthy condition. Strong consideration should be given to the correct structure of a bull's scrotal package and sheath when choosing class placements. Strong consideration should be given to a cow's udder, especially the quality of the udder attachments, udder structure and shape, teat structure and shape, and teat placement when choosing class placements. Grooming and fitting of Dexters in the show ring should not be a consideration in show placements.